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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ASHGABAT 001167

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EPET](#) [PHUM](#) [GE](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER MEETS NIYAZOV

REF: ASHGABAT 899

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.
4 (B) and (D).

Summary

1. (C) German Foreign Minister Steinmeier's November 2 visit to Turkmenistan provided him a telescoped confirmation of the challenges to developing democracy in Turkmenistan, according to an outbrief provided by German Ambassador to Turkmenistan Hans Mondorf. Not only were Steinmeier and his delegation treated rudely, but Steinmeier was subjected to a three-hour rant by the president on Turkmenistan's spectacular achievements, spotless human rights record and enormous economic potential. Niyazov had his cabinet individually deny any knowledge of the government's de facto confiscation of a joint venture chicken farm which had been under the protection of a bilateral investment protection treaty. Niyazov angrily denied Steinmeier's observation that education had deteriorated in Turkmenistan and ruled out regional cooperation, saying it was "dangerous." During a subsequent "four-eyes" meeting between the two, he had Steinmeier play Freud as Niyazov described his life as an orphan. According to Mondorf, Steinmeier's mission in Central Asia was primarily "information-gathering," and that Steinmeier did not divulge his impressions of Niyazov or Turkmenistan to Mondorf. Mondorf said he suspected his foreign minister was waiting to draw any conclusions until he had visit all five Central Asian capitals. End Summary.

Schlechte Manieren

2. (C) Mondorf starting off his November 6 briefing of the second tier (Charge's characterization) of the U.S.,

Georgian, Romanian and Turkish COMS (he briefed the French and UK Ambassadors on November 3) by complaining about the embarrassing lack of manners displayed by the government during Foreign Minister Steinmeier's November 2 visit to Ashgabat. Mondorf said only the minister and a few high-ranking advisors had been exempted from visa fees and that the delegation was forced to pay \$2,000 in visa fees before they were permitted to leave the airport. Mondorf claimed Turkmenistan was the only country in Central Asia to charge the delegation visa fees.

¶3. (C) Mondorf said that even as the delegation was paying the \$2k, Turkmenistan's MFA Protocol was insisting the delegation run out and buy two wreaths for laying at the Niyazov family mausoleum in Gypjak and the Independence Monument. Steinmeier protested saying only the Prime Minister was authorized to lay wreaths and compromised by agreeing to lay a bouquet at the mausoleum only, there was no time for both sites.

¶4. (C) The meeting with the president had been scheduled to last 45 minutes, instead it lasted for three and a half hours with the president speaking for the bulk of the time. The length of the presidential meeting seriously delayed follow-on meetings including with the Central Bank and with the Parliament (Mejlis). Though members of the German delegation had planned these as calls separate from Minister Steinmeier's meetings, local government representatives refused to speak until they heard the presidential meeting had been concluded.

¶5. (C) The government then attempted to postpone a meeting the embassy had planned at the German Ambassador's residence with representatives of international organizations by having MFA Protocol literally beg the minister to lay flowers at the

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Gypjak mausoleum. Following the Gypjak event, with the international organizations representatives still waiting, MFA Protocol whispered to Steinmeier's local driver, "take them to the Independence Monument now," This instruction, fortunately, was overheard by the embassy's translator who got the German delegation to protest. Even so, Mondorf said, the motorcade escorts proceeded to drive back into town at the speed of a cortege and, Mondorf claims, intentionally led the delegation on a 30 minute crawling goose chase through the residential suburbs of Ashgabat. Mondorf claims his driver was frantically honking his horn and attempting to wave the escort in the direction of the ambassador's house, to no avail. The meeting with the international organizations eventually occurred, almost an hour late and for a shorter duration.

Freud

¶6. (C) Steinmeier's meeting with Niyazov, according to Mondorf, consisted of three hours of a Niyazov monologue and 30 minutes of substance. Mondorf said that the press coverage of the meeting basically was accurate, the president talked about:

-- Bilateral Economic Cooperation - Room for growth in the oil and gas sector.

-- Achievements since Independence - GDP per capita has grown from \$7 in 1992 to \$8,000 in 2006.

-- Oil and Gas - Current customers only included Russia and Iran (Comment: Interesting he didn't mention Ukraine); future customers could be China, India and UAE. Niyazov also bragged about his new deal with Gazprom selling 50 bcm for \$100/tcm. Niyazov asked for German assistance in building a new pipeline, through Kazakhstan, along the northern coast of the Caspian. (Comment: Local press reported that Steinmeier agreed to assist with the pipeline, Mondorf says, Steinmeier

only agreed to "consider all questions." End Comment.)

17. (C) Following this Steinmeier raised his and EU priorities in Central Asia, noting that a new approach to Central Asia would be a key theme of the German Presidency of the EU. Steinmeier said Germany were interested in pursuing the following in Central Asia:

-- Regional Cooperation - Steinmeier thanked Turkmenistan for its contributions to the global war on terror and in particular for Turkmenistan's assistance in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Steinmeier also noted Turkmenistan and Germany shared a common interest in preventing Iran's nuclear armaments program and encouraged Turkmenistan to take a more active role. "We've wasted three years talking to them," Steinmeier said, according to Mondorf, "we need more pressure on Iran from the region." Steinmeier urged all five Central Asian states to work together on this and other issues saying the the EU example had been that working together gave the region as a whole more political weight. Not only would Central Asia as a group have more weight in dealing with Russia and China, he said, but also in dealing with the EU and the United States. "That's a dangerous idea," Niyazov responded. "We're developing at different speeds and there are no conditions for closer cooperation." He added, "Neither the Kazakhs nor Uzbeks have anything we want to buy." Later in the conversation Niyazov added that Turkmenistan was on the brink of becoming a "big power," and cited the plans of his 2007-2030 oil and gas plan. In terms of assistance to Afghanistan Niyazov said Turkmenistan already was selling cheap gasoline and electricity across the border. He also said he was considering Afghanistani President Karzai's request that Turkmenistan forgive its \$10

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million debt. Niyazov also insisted that Turkmenistan was not a problem in terms of drug trafficking from Afghanistan, "the traffickers go through Uzbekistan and Tajikistan," he said. In terms of Iran, though, drug trafficking was a problem he said, noting that the Iranians use the three million ethnic Turkmen living in Iran to carry out their drug trafficking. "We've killed 30 ethnic Turkmen smugglers, this year alone," he bragged. Niyazov also told Steinmeier that Turkmenistan had prevented Iranian planes carrying nuclear materials from North Korea to transit Turkmenistan and said, "we recently denied a South Korean (sic) request for one its planes to land for repairs." Also in terms of Iran, Niyazov noted that Iranian President Ahmadinejad was recalling the current Iranian Ambassador to Turkmenistan and replacing him with one of his, Ahmadinejad's, supporters, after the ambassador embraced Niyazov during Ahmadinejad's July visit to Turkmenistan.

-- Economic Cooperation - According to Steinmeier, Turkmenistan was not living up to its economic potential. Its geographic isolation and generally unfavorable investment climate discouraged more foreign investment in Turkmenistan. In this context, Steinmeier said, the experience with German citizen Dogan and his chicken farm set a dangerous example. Enraged, Niyazov stood up and claimed no knowledge of "this Dogan." He made his entire cabinet stand up and one by one asked all of them, including Meredov, if they had heard of "this Dogan." "No Dear Leader," they all, including Meredov, responded. (Comment: Not only does Niyazov know about Dogan, but the chicken farm is practically the only issue Mondorf has raised with Meredov during his four year assignment to Turkmenistan. Former Ambassador Jacobson and Charge also have raised the chicken farm issue with Meredov. End Comment.) At this point Steinmeier produced a letter from the German Economy Minister to the president saying Turkmenistan was in violation of its bilateral investment protection agreement and that the arrest of Dogan's local partners had been under false pretences. (Note: Dogan's partners, a father and two sons, had received three jail terms for "illegally fertilizing land." End Note.)

-- Human Rights - Steinmeier noted the EU's recent decision to suspend its Partnership and Cooperation Agreement because of "internal political developments in Turkmenistan," and also general EU concern about deteriorating education in Turkmenistan." Niyazov angrily responded, "I don't know why you shout at us about human rights violations, I know it's the United States feeding you this disinformation. We have no human rights violations here, we have freedom of opinion, there is no surveillance, you Europeans give safe haven to our terrorists. Even Turkey is voting with the United States because they think it will help get them into the EU. Of course we have one political party here and no opposition because the people are happy with their government." Steinmeier reminded Niyazov that the EU was a sophisticated mature political body that made its own decisions independent of the United States. Steinmeier recommended that Niyazov try to learn how to better handle the EU. "We're not perfect, but we're not repressive," Niyazov said. Niyazov rejected Steinmeier's offer to send an experts group to assess human rights in Turkmenistan saying, "that's not necessary when you let four bandits sit in Europe getting money from the United States after they tried to assassinate me in 2002." Warming up to his favorite subject, Niyazov then told Steinmeier that the assassination attempt had been orchestrated by the Russians, in particular then MOD Chief Sergei Ivanov who "had planes ready to land at Mary and Ashgabat to support the coup plotters."

18. (C) At the end of the meeting, Steinmeier asked to meet alone with Niyazov for five minutes. This meeting lasted 35

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minutes. Mondorf was not sure what was discussed except to say Niyazov tried to explain to Steinmeier the trauma of being raised an orphan. Mondorf said he thought Steinmeier also raise the death in prison of local journalist Myradova, but said Steinmeier did not brief him on the details of the meeting.

Comment

19. (C) Formerly one of Niyazov's biggest apologists on the local diplomat circuit, Mondorf was clearly embarrassed to have hosted his boss for such a strange visit. Post considers it more likely that the Department will get a fuller briefing on Steinmeier's impressions of Central Asia than Mondorf will. Post would clearly welcome a stronger EU presence here and hopes that Steinmeier will see the great need and strategic importance of Turkmenistan, as he digests his first taste of Niyazov. End Comment.
BRUSH